

Claims

1. An appliance for evacuating a flexible container, said appliance comprising:
 - a base housing;
 - a vacuum source mounted within said base housing;
 - a recess defined in said base housing and in communication with said vacuum source;
 - a removable drip pan resting in said recess wherein said drip pan is made of a heat-resistant material; and
 - at least one door hingeably mounted to said base housing and closable over said drip pan.
2. The appliance of claim 1 wherein said heat resistant material is a high-temperature polymer.
3. The appliance of claim 2 wherein said high-temperature polymer is polycarbonate.
4. The appliance of claim 1 wherein said drip pan is dishwasher-safe.
5. The appliance of claim 1 wherein said drip pan is replaceable.
6. The appliance of claim 1 wherein said drip pan includes an antibacterial additive.
7. The appliance of claim 1 wherein said drip pan comprises:
 - a fluid-retaining recess defined within said drip pan;
 - an annular wall surrounding at least said recess;
 - an upper vacuum port upstanding from the bottom of said drip pan and positioned within the area surrounded by said annular wall; and

a lower connection in communication with a vacuum inlet on said appliance, said lower connection defined on the bottom of said drip pan for providing removable fluid communication between said lower connection and said vacuum inlet.

8. The appliance of claim 1 wherein said at least one door comprises an inner door hingeably mounted to said base to cover said removable drip pan when in a closed position, and an outer door hingeably attached to said base housing to cover said inner door when said outer door is in a closed position.

9. The appliance of claim 8 further comprising a vacuum nozzle extending at least partially between said inner and outer doors, said nozzle in communication with said recess.

10. A method for evacuating a flexible container, said method comprising the steps of:

isolating an open end of said flexible container from ambient air in a vacuum sealing appliance, said container holding an amount of liquid;

activating a vacuum source within said vacuum sealing appliance to evacuate said container and draw a portion of said liquid into a removable heat-resistant drip pan positioned in said vacuum sealing appliance, said drip pan defining a recessed area for receiving said liquid;

activating a heat sealing means mounted on said vacuum sealing appliance to seal said container;

removing said flexible container from said vacuum sealing appliance; and

removing said drip pan from said vacuum sealing appliance.

11. The method of claim 10 wherein said heat-resistant drip pan is made of a high-temperature polymer.

12. The method of claim 10 wherein said drip pan further comprises polycarbonate.
13. The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of cleaning said drip pan in an automatic dishwasher.
14. The method of claim 13 further comprising the step of placing said drip pan back into said vacuum sealing appliance.
15. An apparatus for evacuating and sealing a plastic bag, said apparatus comprising:
 - a base housing;
 - a vacuum source mounted within said base housing;
 - a removable dishwasher-safe drip pan resting in said base and in communication with said vacuum source;
 - a nozzle extending at least partially over said drip pan in communication with said vacuum source;
 - a pair of doors hingeably mounted to said base housing and surrounding said nozzle for engaging said bag when an opening of said bag is positioned around said nozzle; and
 - a heating element mounted on one of said doors for heat-sealing said bag.
16. The apparatus of claim 15 wherein said drip pan is made of a high-temperature polymer.
17. The apparatus of claim 16 wherein said high-temperature polymer is polycarbonate.
18. The apparatus of claim 15 wherein said drip pan is made of polycarbonate.

19. The apparatus of claim 15 wherein said drip pan includes an antibacterial additive.
20. The apparatus of claim 15 wherein said drip pan includes a disinfectant.
21. A removable drip pan for a vacuum-sealing appliance containing a vacuum inlet mounted in a base, said removable drip pan comprising:
 - a fluid-retaining recess defined within said pan;
 - an annular wall surrounding at least said recess;
 - an upper vacuum port upstanding from the bottom of said pan and positioned within the area surrounded by said annular wall;
 - a lower connection port in communication with said upper vacuum port, said lower connection defined on a bottom of said drip pan for providing removable fluid communication between said lower connection and said vacuum inlet; and
 - said drip pan made of a heat resistant material.
22. The drip pan of claim 21 wherein said heat resistant material is a high-temperature polymer.
23. The drip pan of claim 22 wherein said high-temperature polymer is polycarbonate.
24. The drip pan of claim 21 wherein said heat resistant material is polycarbonate.
25. The drip pan of claim 21 wherein said drip pan is replaceable.
26. The drip pan of claim 21 wherein said drip pan is dishwasher-safe.